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APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: SEP 2004

The Soviet Strategic Planning Process and SALT

An Intelligence Assessment

Top Secret

RP 78-10035JX

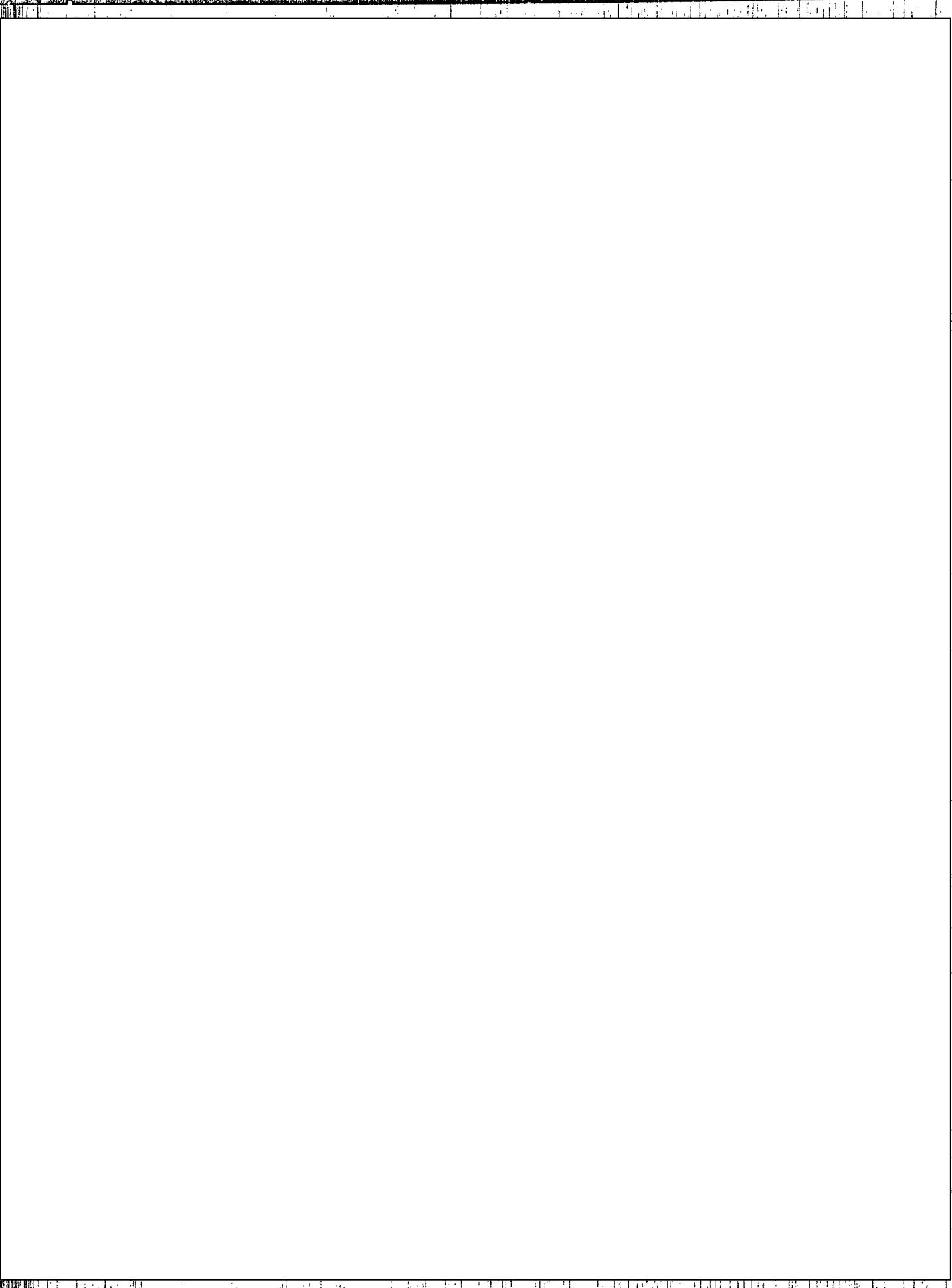
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Preface

SALT negotiations have taken place with a great disparity in the information available to the two participants at any given time. The Soviets have had a far better understanding of our force structure, capabilities, and future plans than we have had of Soviet strategic systems and intentions. In retrospect, accumulated evidence and insight can reduce, but not eliminate, the disparity in knowledge. This paper examines the mass of old and new evidence involved and offers an interpretation of the way in which Soviet strategic plans and SALT negotiating tactics have interacted. Extensive consultations have been conducted with other offices in NFAC concerning the arguments presented here, and there is general agreement with most of the main judgments reached.

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The Soviet Strategic Planning Process and SALT

*Central Intelligence Agency
National Foreign Assessment Center*

March 1978

The Soviet approach to SALT negotiations through the Vladivostok summit in 1974 has been largely determined by the goals and momentum of Soviet strategic programs. These programs are embodied in Soviet defense Plans, which codify top-level Soviet strategic intentions and decisions, and to a high degree prefigure and reflect the evolution of the Soviet strategic posture. Defense Plans are a secret part of the state economic Plan for each five-year period and are hammered out in elaborate detail. Among the most important parts of these Five Year Defense Plans are the Soviet strategic programs at issue in SALT, especially those for ICBMs and SLBMs.

Because the primary Soviet strategic objective since the humiliation over Cuba in October 1962 has been to achieve, at a minimum, parity with the United States, there have been powerful political pressures within the Soviet leadership to complete the strategic programs designed to reach this goal. Reinforcing this tendency has been the nature of the Soviet defense planning cycle itself—which seems more rigid and deterministic than the defense planning process in the United States and, particularly since the early 1960s, has extracted early, long-term commitments from key Soviet leaders. Five Year Defense Plans have been used by the top leadership to coordinate and control strategic weapons programs of great complexity, long leadtime (10 to 15 years), and enormous expense.

Plans provide for the financing and pace of all ICBM R&D scheduling in the defense industries, ICBM plant construction, ICBM production within the plant, and silo construction by military construction battalions for the Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF). The Plans finance all weapons production, including SSBNs and SLBMs.

The Defense Council Insiders and SALT

Of central importance for the SALT negotiations has been the tight control exercised on the Soviet side by the same exclusive group of men who control the defense planning process and who have a vested interest in the execution of the Five Year Defense Plans.

A small group of top political, military, and defense industry leaders dominates Soviet strategic decisionmaking and supervises the preparation and execution of defense Plans. These defense policy Insiders are the members of the Defense Council. They include the top political leaders—the party General Secretary (Brezhnev), the President (formerly Podgorny, now Brezhnev), and the Premier (Kosygin), as well as the Minister of Defense (formerly Marshal Grechko, now Marshal Ustinov). In addition, this group has customarily included the party secretary respon-

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sible for defense affairs and also the chiefs of the General Staff and of the Military-Industrial Commission (VPK), which runs the Soviet defense industry. The Foreign Minister, Gromyko, and the KGB Chairman Andropov, have probably also been members since April 1973, when they were promoted to full membership in the Politburo. There is good evidence to show that this limited group has in the past worked consistently to ensure that SALT does not significantly hinder implementation of ongoing Soviet strategic programs.

The role and influence of the Soviet military leadership within the Defense Council have reinforced this Soviet approach to SALT aimed at protecting their strategic programs. There is a sizable body of [redacted] evidence testifying to the heavy influence which the late Soviet Defense Minister Grechko exerted over the preparation, approval, and execution of the defense Plans—and there is parallel evidence suggesting that Grechko had more influence over Soviet SALT strategy than any Soviet leader other than Brezhnev himself. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was careful to consult Grechko on even the most mundane SALT issues, and Grechko strongly influenced resolution of the major SALT issues both in the Defense Council and during negotiations with the United States.

The military's influence is enhanced by institutional arrangements. Under the supervision of the Minister of Defense and the party secretary for defense affairs, the General Staff and the Military-Industrial Commission (VPK) in effect comprise an interlocking directorate that exerts extensive and exclusive control over the development, production, testing, and deployment of new weapons. Six closely interrelated factors account for this situation:

- The monopoly of expertise of this interlocking directorate.
- The pervasive secrecy and compartmentation it imposes.
- Its near-monopoly of access to the political leadership on defense issues.

- The lengthy tenure of its leading figures.
- Their close collaboration and converging interests.
- The economic priority attached to military programs which reinforces their power and probably mitigates competition for allocations among them.

As the exclusive customers of the military production of the defense industry, the military dominates the VPK and exerts extensive influence over the production of strategic systems.

The Origins of the New Fourth ICBM Generation

These closely knit personal and institutional relationships had important consequences for the evolution and protection of Soviet strategic programs both prior to and during SALT I. The conceptual design of the new Soviet fourth-generation ICBMs probably began somewhat earlier, but it was evidently 1965—the key year for preparing the 1966-70 Plan—in which the new Brezhnev leadership committed the resources necessary for the development of these missiles. Continued high-level concern for the development of the new missiles was evident throughout the last half of the 1960s, well before the United States [redacted]

sought to limit their deployment under SALT I. Soviet willingness to participate in SALT I was in fact probably heavily influenced by the stage that the USSR's new missile programs had reached by the end of the decade. Deployment of the third-generation ICBMs was peaking—yet still preoccupying the United States—but the Soviets were looking ahead to the testing and deployment of fourth-generation ICBMs in the 1970s. Under Grechko's strong influence, the primary Soviet goals in SALT I appear to have been to curtail the more technically advanced US ABM program while at the same time preventing constraints upon both the new generation of Soviet ICBMs under development and also upon the ongoing Soviet SSBN/SLBM program.

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Probable Membership of Soviet Defense Council



Brezhnev
General Secretary/President
Defense Council Chairman
Marshal of Soviet Union
Supreme Commander in Chief



Gromyko
Foreign Minister



Ustinov
Defense Minister



Kosygin
Premier



Andropov
KGB Chairman



Ryabov
Party Secretary for defense affairs



Ogarkov
Chief, General Staff



Smirnov
VPK Chief

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1st GENERATION ICBM SS-8
First flight-tested: 1957, Initial operational capability: 1960

2nd GENERATION ICBMs
First flight-tested: 1960
Initial operational capability: 1962
1963

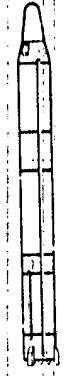
SS-7



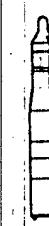
Soviet ICBM Generations

3rd GENERATION ICBMs
First flight-tested: 1963
Initial operational capability: 1968

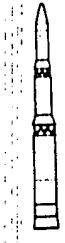
SS-9



SS-11



SS-13



1 or 3 MRV 1 or 3 MRV

1

RVs

Yield (each RV)

CEP

Throw weight (lbs)

Volume

Year operational

4th GENERATION ICBMs

First flight-tested: 1972
Initial operational capability: 1975

SS-18



1962

1963

1966

1968

1969

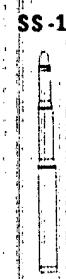
SS-13



SS-17



SS-16



1975

1976

1975

0.25 nm

0.5 to 1 nm

1.0 nm

RVs

Yield (each RV)

CEP

Throw weight (lbs)

Volume

Year operational

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Adjusting Plans to US Actions

Probably in response to US strategic developments and in anticipation of US SALT proposals, in late July 1970 the Defense Council appears to have decided to curtail plans to construct the last few third-generation silos and in their place to hasten the initiation of an equivalent number of new fourth-generation silo starts. While these steps posed a number of risks for SALT and detente in 1970 and early 1971, the safeguarding of strategic programs was evidently deemed more important. US willingness to continue negotiations in the face of the hastened fourth-generation silo starts discovered in early 1971 was apparently regarded by Moscow as evidence that the United States might ultimately accept the fourth generation as a *fait accompli*. Until the United States showed that it was inclined to accept the prospect of deployment of some Soviet fourth-generation MIRVed ICBMs as inevitable, the Soviet commitment to SALT evidently remained tentative.

SALT I Versus the Plan

In early 1971 the Soviets firmed up strategic plans for the next five years and at about the same time agreed with the United States to negotiate limitations on offensive strategic weapons within a year. These twin commitments came into increasing conflict, however, as reflected in two closely related decisions of mid-1971. At that time, preparations to build a few additional new fourth-generation silos were abandoned and the beginning of planned large-scale conversion of third-generation silos for fourth-generation missiles was temporarily postponed until after a SALT I agreement. In the long run, however, SALT appears to have had only a moderate impact on eventual implementation of existing ICBM and SLBM production and deployment plans. These plans were destined to have a major impact on the Soviet approach to SALT.

By the spring of 1972 the Soviets were probably increasingly anxious to lift their temporary freeze on conversion of third-generation silos in order to avoid more serious disruption of their fourth-generation deployment schedules. In addi-

tion, the primary new ICBMs—the SS-19, SS-18, and SS-17—were undergoing launch-phase testing and appear to have been either ready or approaching readiness for flight testing. These considerations probably increased the urgency of concluding a SALT agreement in May 1972, because the resumption of silo conversion or the commencement of ICBM flight testing would eventually reveal to the United States certain characteristics of the new missiles—their large size and MIRV capabilities—that would undermine Soviet SALT positions and probably harden the SALT positions of the United States. Yet at the same time, the Soviets could not, in the interests of achieving a SALT agreement, afford to make concessions which would jeopardize their strategic force plans or require violation of the agreement in the future in order to achieve these plans. As in July 1970 the Soviets in May 1972 faced a possible choice between their programs and a SALT agreement. This fundamental dilemma would shape Soviet negotiating positions and tactics throughout the hectic May 1972 summit in Moscow during which the SALT I Agreements were concluded.

The May 1972 SALT I Summit

The SALT I summit demonstrated the extent of Brezhnev's dependence upon the expertise of other Defense Council Insiders and his willingness to defer to their views, especially Grechko's. As chairman of the Defense Council, Brezhnev had earlier presided over adoption of the 1966-70 defense Plan and the 1971-75 defense Plan and as Politburo representative for SALT at the summit he had formal political authority to conclude an agreement. Yet during the summit, Brezhnev had a remarkably poor understanding of some key details of both the 1971-75 Plan and the SALT I negotiating record. Because of this ignorance, Brezhnev made certain initial concessions to President Nixon early in the summit—on mobile ICBMs, on the minimum separation of ABM sites, and most importantly, on ICBM size constraints—which were quickly recognized to be harmful to Soviet interests and subsequently were withdrawn.

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Marshal Grechko, Brezhnev's most influential adviser
on SALT

Brezhnev and Grechko were concerned with three main SALT I issues during the 22 to 26 May 1972 summit:

- The missile/silo size issue, which revolved around US attempts to constrain Soviet heavy ICBMs.
- The total number of Soviet modern ballistic missile submarines and SLBM launchers to be allowed, including agreement to a baseline above which some old weapons would have to be deactivated in order for the Soviets to build up to their SSBN/SLBM ceiling.
- The banning of mobile ICBMs.

In the interest of preserving their strategic plans, as may be expected in international negotiating an element of deception was involved in the Brezhnev-Grechko approach to the resolution of each of these issues. In each case, the Soviets also took advantage of [redacted] uncertainties concerning Soviet strategic programs.

The missile/silo size issue hinged on the SS-19. Brezhnev and Grechko realized that their new SS-19, for which some silos had been prematurely constructed beginning in 1970, was a heavy missile by the standard then being proposed by the United States. The SS-19 was not flight-tested until April 1973.

The Soviets' negotiating problem stemmed from the fact that their strategic programs, embodied in the 1971-75 Five Year Plan approved the year before, involved deployment of a large number of SS-19s, most of which would be deployed in converted SS-11 silos. At that time, the United States defined SS-11s as light missiles. The United States sought an agreed definition of a heavy missile, and because the United States proposed in Article II of the Interim Agreement to prohibit deployment of heavy missiles in light-missile silos, the Soviets had a major dilemma.

The Soviets clearly knew that the United States was concerned with the threat posed by the Soviet new large missiles, particularly if installed in smaller SS-11 silos. However, as long as there was no agreement on a definition of a heavy missile, the USSR could accept Article II, for it would be an ineffectual constraint on Soviet deployment plans for the SS-19.

To avoid confirmation of US fears and to legitimize SS-19 deployment under SALT, the Soviets refused to agree to a definition of a heavy missile, arguing that a definition of a heavy missile was unnecessary because both sides already knew (through national technical means) which missiles were heavy. In negotiating on this issue, Brezhnev evidently believed that the United States would not sign either the Interim Agreement or the ABM Treaty linked to it if Soviet deployment plans for the SS-19 and its size became known to the United States. Brezhnev and Grechko therefore attempted to prevent the United States from realizing the actual sizes of their new fourth-generation ICBMs, particularly the SS-19, during the summit. The Soviets thus

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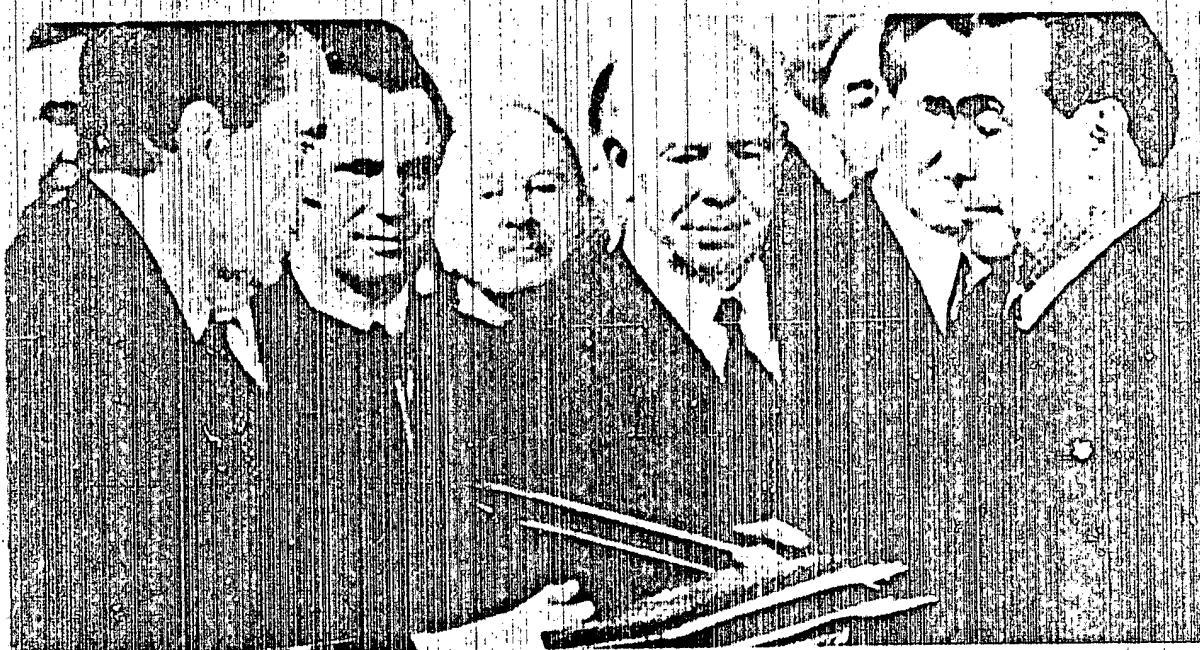
took advantage of US uncertainties concerning the sizes and MIRV capabilities of their new unflight-tested ICBMs.

The Soviets' approach to the SSBN/SLBM ceilings was to attempt to codify the existing plans for their program. Retrospective analysis

suggests that the ceilings of 62 modern submarines and 950 SLBMs agreed upon for 1977 under the Interim Agreement were derived from the Soviet SSBN/SLBM programs contained in the original 1971-75 Plan. Soviet SSBN construction starts continued after May 1972 at the relatively high rate established since 1967.

The 62nd submarine was begun in mid-1975, the last year of the 1971-75 Plan; and the last of the 62 were nearing operational status by late 1977. In May 1972, however, the United States did not know what the Soviet goal for 1977 was, and therefore US agreement to the 62/950 ceilings for the Soviets could be seen as a constraint.

The highly complex issue of deactivation was closely related to the SSBN/SLBM ceilings. A US condition for allowing the Soviets their high 62/950 levels was the requirement that the Soviets deactivate some older weapons. The Soviets were very reluctant to agree to deactivate any older weapons in order to reach the SSBN/SLBM ceilings. In negotiating the baseline for existing submarines and SLBMs operational or under construction, which would determine the number of old weapons to be deactivated as these ceilings were approached, the Soviets maximized both the number of submarines and the number of SLBMs they claimed to be operational and under construction in 1972. They exploited US uncertainty about the numbers of SSBNs they had



The SALT I signing ceremony, 26 May 1972

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operational and under construction, and the numbers of SLBMs per submarine. Their purpose in this was to minimize the number of old weapons they would have to deactivate.

Moreover, the Soviets probably did not want to reveal a technical characteristic of one of their new SLBMs which would have weakened justification for their high ceilings. In May 1972 the Soviet leaders knew that the range of one of their new SLBMs would tend to undermine their main argument for being allowed the high 62/950 ceilings. They had already designed and begun to test a new SLBM, the SS-N-8, which within six months after the summit would fly to a range of about 4,300 nautical miles, a distance considerably greater than that of any previous Soviet SLBM. With this long range, the SS-N-8 could be fired to most US targets without leaving Soviet ports. This in turn suggests that the Soviets probably did not want to test the SS-N-8 to its extended range until after the summit in order not to undercut their "geographical asymmetries" argument. The Soviet argument held that because of the lack of forward SSBN bases comparable to US forward bases and the consequent need for longer patrols, the Soviet Union was justified in claiming higher SSBN/SLBM ceilings than the United States. About 40 percent of the 950 Soviet SLBMs will probably have this long-range capability. Thus, the greater range of the SS-N-8,

[redacted] has significantly weakened although not destroyed this justification for the Soviet SLBM advantage.

The Soviets also rejected US attempts to ban mobile ICBMs, although Brezhnev seemed conciliatory on this issue. The fact that the United States attempted during the negotiations to prevent the Soviets from deploying such missiles and the fact that the United States issued a Unilateral Statement warning against mobile ICBM deployment probably restrained Soviets from deploying their mobile ICBM, the SS-16, after the summit. They have, continued, however, to produce a significant number of SS-16 missiles, thereby committing resources to one of the most expen-

sive elements in procurement of a mobile missile system.

The Effects of SALT I for the USSR

In May 1972 the Soviets thus achieved a SALT agreement essentially compatible with their planned strategic programs. The evidence from the summit and subsequent evidence of Soviet plans and behavior indicated that SALT I had at most a marginal inhibiting effect upon previous Soviet intentions for production and deployment of strategic weapons. While it is theoretically conceivable that the ABM Treaty canceled preliminary Soviet plans for eventual ABM deployment at more than the two sites initially permitted by the treaty, there is no evidence that such plans existed. By constraining the more technically advanced US ABM program, the treaty may have reduced the felt need for additional ABM deployment, but there is no reason to believe that the Soviets abandoned any ABM deployment intentions in order to achieve the SALT I Agreements. They have not, in fact, built up to the ABM level permitted in the treaty.

Soviet plans for the deployment of ICBMs and SLBMs do not appear to have been greatly affected. Although prior to SALT I some estimates anticipated a considerably larger deployment of SS-18s than has occurred, a variety of evidence argues that in early 1971 the Soviets probably did not intend SS-18 deployment on such a large scale in the first place. While as a result of the SALT I negotiating process there was probably some trimming of SS-18 deployment plans, this effect was likely to have been limited. Thus, while it is more likely that the circumstances surrounding SALT I did act to some degree as an inhibiting factor upon Soviet plans to deploy the mobile SS-16, the main lines of strategic development envisaged in the defense plans—for ICBM modernization and SLBM deployment—were not significantly constrained by SALT I.

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Potential Soviet SSBN Deployment Areas and Coverage of US Targets

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Y-class patrol area
Portions of North America covered by SS-N-6 missiles fired from Y-class patrol areas

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D-class patrol area
Area from which D-class submarines have complete coverage of the United States with SS-N-8 missiles—assuming 9,000 km range
Area from which D-class submarines have partial coverage of the United States with SS-N-8 missiles—assuming 9,000 km range

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Strategic Plan Execution Following the SALT I Agreements

Evidence since the 1972 SALT I summit, including a number of public and private Soviet statements, confirms that the SALT I Agreements did not significantly affect deployment of Soviet fourth-generation ICBMs and SLBMs. Soviet strategic plans appear to have remained virtually intact, with no abrupt shifts having taken place following the signing of the SALT I Agreements or during the transition from the 1971-75 Plan to the 1976-80 Plan. However, in a response analogous to the decision on hastened deployment of silos intended for MIRVed ICBMs in July 1970, after the Vladivostok SALT II summit in late November 1974 the Soviets evidently decided to accelerate the schedule for the initial flight testing of their first MIRVed SLBM and also to increase the total number of MIRVed SLBMs to be deployed by 1985.

As a result of the ceiling of 1,320 launchers for MIRVed missiles tentatively agreed upon at Vladivostok, the Soviets evidently decided to accelerate SLBM MIRV (SS-NX-18) testing dur-



The signing ceremony at the conclusion of the Vladivostok summit, 24 November 1974

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ing 1975 and to make plans for more MIRVed SLBM deployment under the 1976-80 Plan being prepared in 1975. While the Soviet Typhoon SSBN program had probably been under way since about 1970, after Vladivostok the Soviets probably also finalized plans for the level of Typhoon submarine deployment. By mid-1975 the Soviets stopped offering to trade constraints on Typhoon for constraints on the US Trident. These steps were probably taken in reaction to the US-proposed Vladivostok ceiling of 1,320 launchers for MIRVed missiles for 1985.

prior to Vladivostok the Soviets had planned to deploy only about 1,062 MIRVed ICBMs and SLBMs through about 1980. After Vladivostok they evidently decided to deploy more SLBMs with MIRVs by 1985. The Soviets were apparently also influenced to do this by the stimulus of the US Poseidon and Trident MIRV programs, which allocate to US SLBMs 736 of the 1,320 launchers for MIRVed missiles allowable under the Vladivostok guidelines.

The Present and Future Soviet Attitudes Toward SALT

The record to date tends to support the proposition that the Soviets have not been willing to allow SALT to constrain those long-planned programs deemed essential to achieve a mix of quantitative and qualitative strategic capabilities equal if not superior to those of the United States. The evidence also suggests that in the interests of

obtaining SALT constraints upon US strategic programs, the Soviets have at times sought to mislead the United States on the degree of restraint imposed on their strategic programs by SALT. In doing this, they exploited the limitations on US knowledge of Soviet strategic programs and encouraged a mistaken United States assumption that SALT provisions would significantly constrain Soviet deployment intentions, when in fact they did not. The Soviets have assiduously sought ambiguities in the wording of the SALT agreements for this purpose.

This behavior does not necessarily mean, however, that the Soviets under no circumstances in the future will ever allow a SALT agreement to significantly curtail strategic programs already embodied in the defense Plans. The possibility that the USSR may eventually do this will depend upon the interaction of factors which cannot yet be measured. One is the degree to which the Soviets remain satisfied that they have, in fact, permanently overcome strategic inferiority to the United States, and the degree to which such confidence may reduce the political pressures upon the Soviet leadership to maintain their strategic buildup. A second unknown is the degree to which economic problems may bring pressures for a reduction in the military budget—or, conversely, for a shift of resources toward further increases in military power, through which the leadership may believe that it can compete more effectively with the West.

The author of this paper is [redacted] formerly of the Office of Regional and Political Analysis, now of the Office of Strategic Research. Comments and queries are welcome and should be directed to [redacted]

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